

Home[state]less Rohingyas in Quandary:  
The Discursive Exposé of Rohingya Narratives from Cox's Bazaar Camps

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The February 2021 military coup in Myanmar arguably halted the return of the forcibly displaced Rohingyas to Myanmar, their 'home', for an uncertain period. This same military had been the most instrumental actor to suppress the Rohingyas for five decades. The Government of Myanmar had confiscated their citizenship rights through constitutional changes and displaced them several times through brutal, violent military operations. The United Nations, in recent times, identified the military crackdown and persecution of the Rohingyas as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing" with genocidal intent. However, the plight of Rohingyas in their homeland was severely underreported in the international arena. Since 2017, about a million Rohingyas were forced to leave their homeland to neighbouring Bangladesh in a very short span of time that the world community came to recognise the gravity of atrocity. The subsequent UN investigations and legal proceedings at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) strengthened the case. After the 2017 mass killing and forced eviction, some serious academic studies emerged to recognise the claim's global legitimacy. These works have uncovered various aspects of the Myanmar state and its treatment of the Rohingya ethnic minority. Now in the current context of the military coup, it is crucial to revisit the voice of Rohingyas on their plight—physical tortures and destructions of the conditions of lives leading to both homelessness and statelessness in Myanmar.

Against that backdrop, this paper intends to understand the meaning of 'home' and 'state' for the Rohingyas. Legally they were non-citizens of Myanmar since the 1980s. However, they lived in Arakan in their houses and surroundings, which is shared by their family and neighbours—Rohingyas and Rakhaines. The central question sought in their narratives is—has Myanmar ever turned into a 'homeland' for them? Rakhaines are the significant 'others', and they dishonoured Rohingyas. Rohingyas experienced severe ill-treatment to get what they are entitled to get as citizens of Myanmar. Authorities do not like Rohingyas, who disobeyed their instructions; they would have to pay a monetary fine or get beaten by uniformed security forces. Prayers, Azan—religious practices were also prohibited. The physical oppression from the state and military and legal deprivation as citizens would have constructed their idea of 'home' in Myanmar. Did they envisage their future homeland in Myanmar, or could they differentiate between 'home' and the 'state'? The personal narratives of camp-based Rohingyas on their ideas of 'home' in Myanmar demonstrate the features of statelessness vis-à-vis homelessness and the treatments by the mighty state towards them.

This paper includes seventy-five micro-narratives (or life stories) of Cox's Bazaar camp-based Rohingyas to understand their ideas of 'home' and 'state'. It observes multiple experiences of violence against the Rohingyas in Myanmar. In these life stories, the Rohingyas describe how the Myanmar military and the state deprive them of their rights and made them stateless legally, physically and emotionally. What do they think about their 'home' from where they were forcefully evicted, tortured and forced to flee to their makeshift 'homes' in Bangladesh. The paper argues that the legality of stateless is insufficient to understand the plight of the victims, and their narratives would offer a discursive portrayal of the process of homelessness vis-à-vis statelessness over the decades—which is worth a further examination.